

Passing on a Legacy: Standing on the Shoulders of Those Who Have Gone Before Us



....A few words about the stole I'm wearing this morning. It belonged to Bishop Edward Welles, of the Diocese of W. Missouri, who was one of the bishops who ordained the 11 of us to the priesthood in 1974. Before he died, Bp. Welles passed this lovely stole on to the Rev. Sue Hiatt, one of the women he himself had ordained in 1974; and before her death in 2002, Sue Hiatt gave me this stole. I have cherished it – and I will pass it on to Barbara Anne Fisher before I head home this weekend. The passing on of this stole represents to me that we all stand, pray, work, and love on the shoulders of those countless brothers and sisters who have gone before us.... now and forever more.

*The Rev. Carter Heyward, PhD - One of the Philadelphia Eleven
The first women ordained in the Episcopal Church
Quote from sermon given for the Ordination to the Priesthood of
The Rev. Dr. Barbara Anne Fisher December 16, 2017*

Gently running my fingers over the stole's cross, the gasp of surprise heard with Carter's announcement, rises as memory from the depth of my soul. A wooing of the Holy Spirit calls me to pause in silence, a seven-year-old once again hidden in the branches of a cherry tree. Waiting, with gnawed yellow pencil in hand, for the Whisperer to speak. Although the tree is long gone, the "Cherry Tree Theology" impregnated within me still pulsates....my own Marian moment of calling.

Each one of us that breathes has experienced such a moment of calling. The question is whether or not we have yet awakened to it, whether we recognize the God-legacy that foreknew us in the womb. Whether we, as did I when facing the roadblocks of gender and sexual orientation, sputter, "But the dogma of the Church....how can this be?" Or whether we, as Mary, find the courage and fortitude to answer, "Here am I, the servant of God; Let it be with me according to your word," – trusting God will make a way when none exists.

As my *ordained* priestly ministry begins, Carter's words resound: I embrace that I stand, pray, work, and love on the shoulders of others. I continue this journey upon the shoulders of the legacies each of you at St. Alban's have embedded in depths of my heart and Spirit. May the true gift of the legacy birthed with the coming of the Christ-child be the heritage we embrace during this tumultuous time. May we respond, "Here am I, servant of God...ready to stand beside *all* who are victims of social injustices; to pray for *all*; to work towards inclusion of *all*; and to love *all* through the recognition that each have been foreknown by God."

In closing, let us return to Carter's words:

....We should remember that a sacramental ministry is a way of life in which the shapes of God's love, God's justice, and God's life are clarified, lifted up, and celebrated. The more deeply sacramental our lives and ministries, the more God reaches through us to touch the world around us.

May we all see the human pain and suffering of the world through "sacramental eyes." Amen.